

IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1-18, without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please add new claims 19-28 as follows:

Claims 1-18 (canceled).

19. (new) A customer assistance system for large sales area stores having a sales area with a plurality of sales shelves and an entrance to the sales area, the customer assistance system comprising:

- a) at least one central computer programmed for customer assistance;
- b) a plurality of shopping containers, with each shopping container including a passive identification means for providing identity information that can be interrogated;
- c) at least one touch screen device arranged at the entrance to the sales area and connected to the at least one central computer, each at least one touch screen device allowing a customer to machine-readably identify at least one desired good or at least one desired group of goods, and to request help in finding the position of the associated sales shelves;
- d) a plurality of interrogating devices, with each interrogating device included in a respective one of the at least one touch screen devices,
  - with each interrogating device formed by a transmitter/receiver unit and in communication with the at least one central computer,
  - with each interrogating device reading and conveying to the at least one central computer the identity information of a respective shopping container associated with the customer operating the respective at least one touch screen device,
  - with each interrogating device adapted to identify and transmit to the at least one central computer the respective identity information of the respective shopping container entering an area associated with the respective interrogating device,

with the plurality of interrogating devices being distributed over the sales area, and at least one of the plurality of interrogating devices being associated with at least one of the sales shelves;

e) a plurality of information output devices connected to the at least one central computer for outputting guidance and direction information to the customer, with each information output device being associated with one of the plurality of interrogating devices and adapted to being activated by at least one central computer upon detection of at least one shopping container by the associated interrogating device corresponding to the respective shopping container.

20. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein the plurality of shopping containers includes at least one shopping cart.

21. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein the plurality of shopping containers includes at least one shopping basket.

22. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein each passive identification means includes a transponder sending a specific information signal upon being interrogated.

23. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein each of the sales shelves is associated with a respective interrogating device and with a respective information output device.

24. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein the sales area includes a checkout area associated with at least one of the interrogating devices for identification and for transmitting to the at least one central computer the identity information of at least one of the plurality of shopping containers passing the checkout area.

25. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein each information output device includes a display panel for displaying at least one of text information and directional arrows.

26. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein each information output device includes a display panel for providing advertising information, under the control of the at least one central computer, until at least one interrogating device associated with the information output device detects the arrival of at least one shopping container in the range of the respective at least one interrogating device.

27. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein the at least one central computer generates guidance information upon an input to a respective touch screen associate with the customer, wherein the at least one central computer detects actual movement of the customer through the sales area via the plurality of interrogating devices, wherein the at least one central computer generated corrected guidance information in case the customer deviates from a proposed pathway through the sales area.

28. (new) The customer assistance system of claim 19, wherein the at least one central computer records inputs from the touch screen devices and tracks information with respect to a plurality of customers based on information provided by the plurality of interrogating devices.